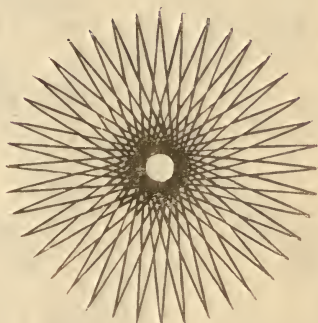


-- THREE --
MIDNIGHT
STORIES --



a. n. Drake

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**THREE
MIDNIGHT STORIES**




A. N. Drake

THREE
MIDNIGHT STORIES

ALEXANDER W. DRAKE

Portrait with Autograph



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1916



A. M. Drake

THREE MIDNIGHT STORIES

BY
ALEXANDER W. DRAKE



NEW YORK
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1916

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A MEMORY

I

It was nearly a quarter of a century ago that I read, in closely succeeding numbers of "The Century" magazine, three stories. One was of a man whose life's aim was to express a veritable haunted house; another of an artist in quest of the perfect halo that would symbolize adoration for a dead wife; the third told of a singing bird, whose cage attached to a miniature balloon had sailed upward to the stars. I read each of these stories several times, and after that waited from month to month for others from the same hand. But there were no more. I often wondered why.

For they seemed to me not as other stories. They were laid in the world of men and ordinary affairs, but they were not of it. Neither were they of any



A MEMORY

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A MEMORY

imagined fairyland. They were of that country where the ideal becomes the only reality—the land of art. I think I shall not try to describe the effect those three stories had upon me. Certainly they lifted me for a little while out of the general commonness of life—revealed for a moment a vision of a world that lies only a touch away yet remains for the most part hidden, because we walk in blindness and miss the magic door.

I had never heard of the writer of those stories. They were signed Alexander W. Drake, and, seeing the name nowhere repeated, it presently passed from my mind. The stories, however, were unforgettable.

II

It was a year or two later, I think, that I found myself in New York City, likewise engaged in the trade of storytelling and, in the course of time and

A MEMORY

fortune, in a position that brought me into frequent association with the editors of the "Century" magazine. Among them was the Art Director, whom I learned to know as A. W. Drake, a man of such modest and gentle manner that I should never have known, had I not been told, that to him more than to any other was due the advancement and refinement of modern magazine illustration. He had been an engraver, they said, and in 1870, when "Scribner's Monthly" was founded, had taken charge of the Art Department of that magazine. Later, "St. Nicholas" had been issued, the name "Scribner's Monthly" was changed to the "Century," and these two publications under Drake's art direction had set the standard of illustration for the publishing world. How unpretentious, how human and lovable he was! Those who have done most in the world are usually like that.

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And Drake was so much more than an art director. His religion—the true religion—was harmony, and his recognition of it so keen, his taste so exquisite, that he lived, as it seemed, in a world of his own. It was a democratic world, wherein the rarest and the humblest things of life were likely to be ranked as of equal value. In whatever form, beauty could not disguise itself from him. Some tint or grace of line in the commonest article of daily use made it for him a treasure. A bit of cheap fabric he recognized as a picture; an old band box in an attic he found to be precious, not only for its breath of romance but often for some refinement of color or quaintness of design; a crude, faded signboard was to him a rare decoration, discarded bottles in an ash-heap were as jewels in a matrix—he could not pass them by. Furbished and skilfully placed in his beautiful home, visitors likewise were led to ap-

A MEMORY

preciate the super-value of these things—to see in a case of variegated glass shapes, with the light shining through, a glory of hue, and tint, and form hitherto undreamed. Along with his thousand treasures of great worth—tapestries, brasses, paintings, jewel cases, finger rings and the like—these humbler gems held rank and, for him at least, equal charm; because he saw them bathed always in the light of his world—the “light that never was on sea or land”—the light that makes the ideal reality, and beauty alone worth while.

III

One day, when I had known Alexander Drake for as much as five years, and had long been proud to claim his friendship, we were going down the Century elevator together when he made a kindly reference to something I had printed that month in the magazine. Then, a moment later, with great diffidence, he added:

A MEMORY

“I—I tried to write some stories, once, a good while ago—but I gave it up. I wrote three and got them printed. You probably never saw them.”

I was about to say no, but then I hesitated. My subconsciousness was spinning backward, and from somewhere flashed the name “Alexander W. Drake,” with those three stories to which it had been attached so long before. I had never forgotten the stories—I had only mislaid their label. I knew instantly, then, as I should have known all the time.

“*Yes!*” I said, grasping his hand. “You are the man who wrote the stories of the haunted house, the halo, and the singing bird! Alexander W. Drake, of course! I remember perfectly. Why I did not remember before is one of the mysteries. Those *wonderful* stories!”

I overflowed in praise of them, and he

A MEMORY

seemed pleased, for he saw that I was sincere. At luncheon we reviewed them and I begged him to do others of the sort. He admitted there were more stories he wished to write—that he hoped to write, someday, when he found the time. He was not an author, he said; the doubt of his literary method made him hesitate. The stories already published, he thought, had made little impression. I reminded him how they had impressed at least one reader, who had watched month after month for more from the same pen. There must be others, I said, like myself.

IV

But he never wrote the other stories. Often we talked of them, and as often he promised someday to set them down. By and by it was evident that he would never write them. He was old, and he was no longer in health.

And so one day he left us, taking

A MEMORY

them with him, and all we have now are those three, written out of his first literary impulse, so long ago. They are akin to those art collections he made, for they include the everyday objects of life, but glorified: a show bottle in a druggist's window, yet lit with magic; a "queer box-like wagon" on Broadway, but driving through dreamland; a miniature balloon bearing a caged bird, but it carries us to the brink of paradise.





THE YELLOW LEAF
A Corner of the Drawing Room



A Corner of the Drawing Room

THE YELLOW GLOBE



THREE MIDNIGHT STORIES

THE YELLOW GLOBE

RETURNING from the club at an hour long past midnight, I noticed a peculiar-looking person of medium height, somewhat angular, with sallow, dark complexion, dressed like any other well-to-do person, gazing intently at the large yellow globe of colored fluid in a druggist's window. The streets were deserted, and his whole attention seemed

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riveted on that particular yellow spot.

A few nights later, about one o'clock, I saw the man again at the same window; so, taking refuge in the shadow of a house opposite, I watched him unobserved. He stood looking earnestly at the bright yellow center of the large globe. Now he held his finger out as though he were trying some effect, or placed his hand in silhouette against the bright background. Then he moved forward and backward, with his head bent first on one side and then on the other, as though he were looking for something beyond and through the fluid. At last he walked away, casting glances backward at the fascinating yellow light, and disappeared in the darkness.

A week passed, and I saw him for the third time again scrutinizing the yellow globe. When he left I followed

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him, and as we passed a street-lamp I accosted him. At first I thought he resented it, but after a moment I ventured to say, "I have observed you gazing into the druggist's window, and I must say my curiosity has been excited to know what you find of such interest in a druggist's yellow light."

Then we walked on for some blocks in silence, and I thought I had offended him; but after a while he said slowly: "The hope of my life is to a certain extent bound up in that yellow spot, the center of that globe. But pardon me, you are a total stranger, and no one but—"

Just then I interrupted him by remarking, "What a beautiful effect of light through the street, and how soft and velvety the shadows look!"

There was another long pause, and

THE YELLOW GLOBE

then he said, "You seem to take pleasure in the effects of light and shade."

"Oh, yes," I answered; "I really enjoy nature very much."

"What would you think of pursuing an effect year after year, as I have done?" he asked.

Now we were fairly launched, and I noticed as we passed the various gas-lights what a peculiar, wistful, far-away look the man had, and what a thoroughly artistic make-up. I also noticed that at every turn of the street he seemed to be looking for something. He would pause now and then, and stand in utter silence, watching some unusual effect in the same intent manner with which he had looked at the druggist's light. In the meantime we were getting into narrower streets, and

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as the shadows of the tall buildings partly hid us, he would give me bits of conversation, always on nature or kindred subjects.

“Yes,” he said; “the mistake that most painters make, especially the realists, is that they paint nature as they think they see it. But what of it? ‘If art is not more than nature, it is not art.’ Why,” said he, “look at the romantic school, both old and modern. Was it not always the embodiment of an idea? Did they not always make Nature do their bidding, with as much or as little of herself as they chose? There is Monticelli—what a wealth of beautiful color! He takes what he wants, and adds his own conception of beauty of color, so that you get his groups of figures rich and glowing and harmonious. So with Delacroix, so with Turner.

THE YELLOW GLOBE

Look at his 'Slave Ship.' All these men borrowed from nature so far as they chose to embody their own idea of what they wished to express."

By this time we had reached the lower part of the city, and the streets became even narrower and the odors more disagreeable. There was a sense of great coolness, like the wind from the water. On we walked. I became more and more interested, and occasionally made a remark to keep the conversation going, while my companion stopped from time to time to watch some new effect, as though he were afraid something would escape him.

"Yes," he said; "I have spent years in an experiment which I hope soon to complete. I have walked the streets by day and night; I have sailed on rivers; I have looked through old doorways,

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have studied all kinds of vegetation and tree-forms suited to my idea and to my notion of sky effects,—old ironwork, old houses, old fences and windows,—in fact, all nature has been to me a great storehouse from which to select my material.”

By this time we had reached the river-front, and although long past midnight, I was so much interested in finding out what manner of man I had chanced upon that I would gladly have walked until daylight. I feared every moment that he would bid me good night; but if anything, he grew more confidential. My chance remark about effects had evidently won him, for some reason. As we walked on, the spars and vessels at the wharves were almost black against the sky, while the lights twinkled across the river, and the stars shone overhead.

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Suddenly we turned a sharp corner, and came to a great pile of old buildings with steep slate roofs—evidently in their better days sail-lofts. And now, in the gloom of one of the tallest of these buildings, he stopped, and, I thought, was about to say good night. For a time he stood as though he were thinking what he had better do. Finally he asked: “Will you come to my room? It is up many flights of stairs, but I think you may perhaps be interested in what I have to show you.”

As we entered the door, which he unlocked with an old-fashioned iron key, he said: “Give me your hand. This building is unoccupied at night, with the exception of myself and a watchman, who has a small room on the ground floor.” So saying, he led me up the creaking stairs, in absolute dark-

THE YELLOW GLOBE

ness. A strong smell of oakum and tar pervaded the place. On reaching the top floor, both of us out of breath, he fumbled for another key, with which he unlocked the door of his room.

Then he excused himself, and left me standing in darkness while he proceeded to strike a light. What a curious room it was! An enormous loft, with a peaked roof, and horizontal beams joining the sides of the building, and several windows of medium size—evidently an old sail-loft, but now filled with a most extraordinary collection of queer objects. At one end of the room were large panes of glass set in upright, movable frames, some of them smeared over with a peculiar mixture. At the other end of the room was a long, plain wooden table, and at its extreme end stood one of the panes of glass. Back

THE YELLOW GLOBE

of this I noticed a globe of yellow fluid, something like those used in the druggist's window, but not so large. Back of the globe again was a small lamp. In another corner of the room was a gigantic thistle, now dead, planted in a large flower-pot. Near it I saw a stuffed blue heron. But, most interesting of all, at the extreme end of another deal table was a model in clay of what seemed to be an old English manor-house, noble in proportion, exquisite in line, and with little glass windows. Back of this model was one of the large upright frames, holding a pane of yellow glass. Here and there were small models of fences, miniature bits of iron-work, gateways, etc. On the walls were nailed the most eccentric sketches. There were gigantic studies of weeds, foreground plants done with strong ef-

THE YELLOW GLOBE

fects in charcoal, and at one end of the room a water-color drawing on brown paper of a great rose-tree, like an enlarged rose-bush. From the ceiling hung globes filled with different-colored fluids, and old ship-lanterns, evidently for some use, not objects of bric-à-brac. In other words, I had been admitted into an immense workshop, where everything had its purpose for the work in hand only. I noticed that a small portion of the room was screened off, probably as a bedroom. Near the stove, on one side, was a cheap round table, on which were a book or two and some newspapers, as well as several new clay pipes.

I have given only an idea of my first hasty survey of the room. I was constantly discovering new objects of interest. Several large, flat, white por-

THE YELLOW GLOBE

celain dishes, with lips at the end, seemed to have held colored liquids of various kinds, which had dried, leaving a sediment in the bottom. Many sheets of drawing-paper on stretchers were standing about the room. This was not the den of an elegant dilettante, but the workshop of a man in earnest about something.

And now, as we settled down in the large leather-covered arm-chairs, and the long clay pipes were lighted, my strange companion became more confidential, although it was plain to be seen that by nature he was a recluse, and perhaps a brooding, melancholy man. After looking me over intently, as though he were studying my first impression of the place, he began:

“You are evidently much surprised and bewildered by the mass of objects

THE YELLOW GLOBE

with which I am surrounded, but they all mean a great deal to me. They all have their place in a new creation I am evolving. They have been collected, at great expense of time and trouble, to help me carry out the idea I am striving to express. Let me explain. First, I wished to render a haunted house which should be not only uncanny and weird, but beautiful as well; in fact, so beautiful that at first you would miss the horrible and mysterious, and notice the beautiful only. How many effects I have studied for this alone! The silver-gray, cold effect was the one I had first thought of, as conveying an impression of weirdness; but I finally settled on a scheme in which the whole picture should be flooded in golden light, but a

Light that never was, on sea or land—

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something of the effect that you might possibly see on an Indian-summer day, when you feel an awful stillness in nature; when the little birds forget to sing, and sit in the sunshine as though they were paralyzed; when even the trees and flowers and all growing things seem to be under some magic spell; when, as you start to walk, you suddenly stand still as if fascinated by the sunlight; when the motion of everything in nature seems suspended. You can hardly understand," he added, "what this haunted house means to me. Windows have grown to have human looks, at times almost terrible. Old fences and iron-work have as keen expressions as individuals. In fact, this whole house wears its personality until I am often deeply depressed by it. Ah, I have had my life's sorrow and trouble, and hor-

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rible—” He stopped suddenly. Did I observe a faint gleam of something like a pained, agonized look in the sudden expression of his eyes and face? If so, it was gone in a moment, and the soft, beautiful look returned, although he seemed a trifle embarrassed.

“Yes,” he continued; “I have worked many years at this haunted house. All there is in me shows itself here to one who can read it, in its various moods and parts; sorrow, love, hope, forgiveness—all are expressed here; and if I can leave behind me this one great picture, I shall be satisfied, even if I never do another. How long I have worked, and how earnestly I have studied for this result! Do you see those globes filled with fluid, and those upright panes of glass set in frames? They are all parts of my experiment; all yellow sunsets and peculiar

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iar effects of yellow light: yellow lights shining through mists and fogs. "Why, look here!" and he handed me a large sketch-book filled with hundreds of studies. In one the trees appeared in silhouette against a sunset sky; in another there would be only a gigantic thistle, or a great rank weed, with the sky for a background. "The house," he said, "was not so difficult a matter, for I had in memory a beautiful old manor-house with its quaint gables and angles and picturesque windows."

Was it a look of horror on the man's face as he spoke of the windows? After an awkward silence he resumed: "Yes; I have thought, and planned, and worked over this picture for years." Then, as we smoked in silence, I had a good opportunity to observe him more minutely. It was evident that gentle

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blood ran in his veins. His head was massive and strong; there was an indescribable softness about his dark eyes, although they showed latent fire. He had a great mass of luxuriant black hair; his beard and mustache were rather long, and very becoming. But now he seemed to feel my glances, and his manner became nervous and agitated. When he again raised his eyes to mine they had grown cold and hard.

“To return to my favorite subject,” he said, “I am going to have my vegetation on a grand scale. I will have thistles as large as trees if they suit my purpose. Rose-bushes shall be rose-trees.”

“But the air of mystery and weirdness—how are you going to manage that?” I asked.

He did not answer me at once, but

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after a while said slowly: "The mysterious will be there, whatever else is lacking; and I intend to get such an effect that if innocent children come near the picture they will walk tiptoe with their fingers on their lips. Strange to say, I have decided to do it in water-color, and not in oil. Although one unquestionably does not get such solidity in water-color, it is better suited to my purpose. Look at those square porcelain dishes with lips, and those great sheets of paper near them—all parts of the experiments I have tried. I can flow washes so transparent that they are like air itself; and as for variety of texture, differences of gradation, look at that!" So saying, he handed me a sheet of paper that glowed like sunlight, while the gray house in the middle distance looked as though it were seen through

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golden mists, or as though its gray were powdered with gold dust.

“That,” he said, “is only one of hundreds of experiments I made before I reached with certainty what I wished to express in yellow light. I see you are looking at the sketch of the rose-tree.”

“Yes,” I replied; “I am very much interested.”

“Oh, well,” he said, “they are all part and lot of my final picture, which is now almost completed. Perhaps you would like to see how I proceed from time to time with my experiments.”

He then turned the light almost out. How uncanny it all seemed to me as I stood, long past midnight, in the dim, shadowy loft! But I was so thoroughly interested that I did not indulge long in reflections. In a few moments he

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lighted a small lamp behind the great pane of yellow glass, which I now saw was smeared over with a weird kind of sky, while the model of the house was almost in silhouette against it. In another moment he had lighted a little lamp under the table, which shone through a small pool or pond, also made of yellow glass, which in turn threw a soft light over the front of the house. Then he illuminated the interior of his house, and through the little windows gleamed a melancholy light, subdued here and there by bits of paint carefully and most artistically added to the windows. Now he placed a small bronze heron on the shore of the miniature pond; then some bits of weeds and grasses. On one side he adjusted a group of thistles, and finally the great rose-tree in miniature at one end of the

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house. To these he kept adding other objects, among them a small sun-dial. Then he led me to the other end of the room, and by some hidden mechanism threw a soft, delicious, but uncanny yellow glow over the whole. The great loft was now in midnight darkness and gloom, and only this beautiful but almost specter-like, haunted little spot glowing with such strange and fascinating light. How real it appeared! I was riveted to the spot; the singular beauty of this miniature house and its surroundings grew on me. We both stood in absolute silence. What strange, hidden something was there about it that affected me so curiously? I felt cold chills begin to creep over me; the stillness became awful. I looked at my companion; he seemed lost in reverie. But it was not merely seem-

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ing, it was with real horror that he stood gazing at those little glass windows. I do not know how long we stood thus; but at last he turned up the light, and I noticed how pale he had become and how absorbed was his manner.

“Now,” he said, “I will show you the picture.” He went to the further end of the room and pulled a large curtain aside, exposing the painting to my view. “You see, all the appliances of my model are but mere hints to me. I use them as I use nature, and as a figure-artist uses a lay figure, taking only so much as I care for.”

If I had been impressed before with all I had seen, how much more was I impressed with the picture! How beautiful! Was the sky painted, or was it real? Now I could well understand all that he had worked so hard to ac-

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comply. Again I began to feel a mysterious awe, cold shivers creeping over me, and again the painter's manner changed. He looked pale and haggard, and an expression of pain and anguish seemed to show itself in his whole being. Another awkward pause, while the beautiful yellow sky glowed like light through amber. A queer, far-away, hold-your-breath sort of feeling came over me. I looked at the front of the house; the paths were choked with great weeds; the sun-dial was moss-covered, and on it was a lizard so quiet that it seemed petrified. On the shore of the pond the heron stood motionless. The little birds were sitting hushed in the branches of the rose-tree. Great thistles, almost black, were in the left foreground, and the gigantic rose-tree was blooming with beauty. But the

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something which made me shudder was the queer, fascinating light shining through the windows, which affected me like a wail from the dead. I expected the next moment to hear a piercing cry from within the house.

“You seem impressed,” he said very gently, and his voice sounded sweet and low. He replaced the curtain over the picture, and, as he did so, said slowly and sadly, “Only a man with a haunted heart can paint a haunted house.”

INTERLUDE

KENSAL GREEN

(October 23, 1890)

With what sorrow, with what sadness,
Laid we one whose heart was gladness
Underneath the gentle sod.
Silver mist and birches true
Wept for him their tears of dew,
Wept for him their tears of dew.

Slowly, sadly we departed;
One was dead, one broken-hearted,
In this graveyard old.
Silver mist and birches true
Wept for both their tears of dew,
Wept for both their tears of dew.

A. W. DRAKE.



THE CURIOUS VEHICLE

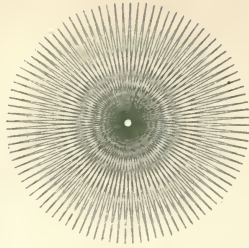
Library in the Residence of

A. W. Drake



View of the Residence of
the President

THE CURIOUS VEHICLE



THE CURIOUS VEHICLE

IT was midnight in early December. A dense silver mist hid the sleeping city, the street-lamps gave a faint yellow glimmer through the almost impenetrable gloom, the air was like the cold breath from the dying, the fog hanging in great drops from my clothing. Stray policemen had taken refuge in sheltering doorways, and my own footsteps echoed with unfamiliar and uncanny sound down the long street—the only sound that broke the midnight stillness, save the hoarse whistles of

THE CURIOUS VEHICLE

wandering and belated ferry-boats on the distant river.

As I emerged from a narrow street into the main thoroughfare, my shivering attention was attracted to a curious covered vehicle standing in the bright glare of an electric light. It was neither carriage nor wagon, but an odd, strongly made affair, painted olive green, with square windows in the sides, reaching from just above the middle to the roof, and a smaller window in the back near the top. On each side of the middle window were two panels of glass. From the middle window only a dim light shone, like a subdued light from a nurse's lamp. On the seat in front, underneath a projecting hood, sat a little old black man wrapped in a buffalo-robe and a great fur coat partly covered with a rubber cape or mackintosh, with a fur

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cap pulled down over his ears. The horse was heavily blanketed, and also well protected with rubber covers. Both man and beast waited with unquestioning patience. Both seemed lost in reverie or sleep.

With chattering teeth I stood, wondering what could be going on in that queer box-like wagon at that time of night. The silence was oppressive. There stood the dimly lighted wagon; there stood the horse; there sat the negro—and I, the only observer of this queer vehicle.

I stepped cautiously to the side of the wagon, and listened. Not a sound from within. Shivering and benumbed, I, too, like the policemen, took refuge in a doorway, and waited and watched for some sound or sign from that mysterious interior. I was too

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fond of adventure to give it up. It seemed to me that hours passed and I stood unrewarded. Just as I was reluctantly leaving, much chagrined to find that I had waited in vain, I saw, thrown against the window for a few moments only, a curious enlarged shadow of a man's head. It seemed to wear a kind of tam-o'-shanter, below which was a shade or vizor sticking out beyond the man's face like the gigantic beak of a bird. A mass of wavy hair and beard showed underneath the cap. Suddenly the shadow disappeared, much to my disappointment, and although I watched in the fog and dampness for half an hour longer, it did not again appear.

I wandered home, puzzled and speculating, but determined that I would wait until morning if I were ever fortunate

THE CURIOUS VEHICLE

enough to come across the vehicle again. Weeks passed before the opportunity occurred, and even then, had it not been for a very singular incident, I doubt if I should ever have fathomed the mystery of the curious vehicle.

It was Christmas eve, the night bitterly cold. I had clothed myself in my thickest ulster. My feet were incased in arctics, my hands in warm fur gloves, and with rough Scotch cap I felt sure I could brave the coldest night. Thus equipped, I started out, and when I returned at midnight in the beginning of a whirling, almost blinding snowstorm, the Christmas chimes were ringing, and the whole air seemed filled with Christmas cheer.

Turning a corner, I discovered the vehicle in the same place and position. This time, as I had before resolved, I

THE CURIOUS VEHICLE

would wait until morning if necessary. So I began pacing up and down the sidewalk in front of the vehicle, taking strolls of five or ten minutes apart, and then returning. I walked until I was almost exhausted. In spite of my heavy ulster I began to feel chilly, so I again took refuge in the doorway of a building opposite.

Should I give it up, I asked myself, after waiting so long? I stood debating the question. No, I would wait a little longer; so, puffing my pipe, I shivered, and watched for developments. At last I was about determined that I must go or perish, when suddenly I saw through the blinding snow the shadow of a pair of hands appear at the dimly lighted window, adjusting a frame or inner sash. You can imagine my interest in the proceedings.

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Just at this moment a street sparrow, numb with the cold, and crowded from a window-blind by its companions, dropped, half falling, half flying, to the sidewalk directly in front of the window of the vehicle. It sat blinking in the bright rays of the electric light, quite bewildered, turning its little head first one way, then the other. In the meantime the shadows of the two hands were still visible. The sparrow, probably attracted by the light and the movement of the hands, suddenly flew up, not striking the glass, but hovering with a quick motion of the wings directly in front of the window, its magnified shadow thrown on it by the rays of the electric light. Then the bird dropped to the ground. The occupant was evidently much startled by the large shadow coming so suddenly and at

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such a time of night. The shadow of his hands quickly disappeared, and so did the frame. In another moment the door of the vehicle opened, giving me a glimpse of a cozy and remarkable interior. It seemed, in contrast with the cold and storm without, filled with warmth and sunshine. It was like a pictorial little room rather than the inside of a wagon or carriage. The occupant looked out in a surprised, excited, and questioning way, as much as to say, "What could that have been?" His whole manner implied that he had been disturbed.

This was my opportunity, and, seizing it instantly, I walked boldly to the door of the vehicle, and said, "It was a little sparrow benumbed with the cold, that fluttered down to the sidewalk, where it lay for a moment, until, prob-

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ably attracted by the light, it hovered for a few seconds before your window, then fell to the ground again.”

I felt the man eying me intently, studying me with a most searching glance. Was he in doubt as to my sincerity? Was it a hidden bond of sympathy between us that made him suddenly relent and invite me to enter his vehicle? What else could have prompted him? For my own part, I instinctively felt for the man, without knowing why, a deep pity.

“Please step inside,” he said; “it is cold.”

And so, at last, I was really admitted, invited into the little interior—that little interior which had piqued my curiosity for so long a time. Yes, I was admitted at last, and now had a chance to look about, and to study the general

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appearance of the occupant as he moved over for me to sit beside him on the roomy, luxurious seat. What a curious personality! He was a tall, raw-boned man of strong character. His soft gray beard and hair made a marked contrast to the dark surroundings. Now I understood the shadow which I had seen thrown on the window for a few seconds. He wore a tam-o'-shanter cap, and beneath it, to protect his eyes from the lamp-light, a large vizer, or shade, which threw his entire face into deep shadow, giving him a look of a painting by an old master. He had on a loose coat of some rough material.

Surely the interior of no conveyance could be more interesting than this. In the front just back of the driver, were two square windows with sliding wooden shutters, and between the two

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was a little square mirror. Above these was a rod, from which hung a dark-green cloth curtain which could be drawn at will. Underneath was a chest, or cabinet, of shallow drawers filling the entire width of the carriage, with small brass rings by which to pull them out. On top of this cabinet stood several clear glass jars half filled with pure water. There were two or three oil-lamps with large shades hung in brackets with sockets like steamer-lamps, only one of which was lighted. Underneath the seat was a locker. On the floor of the conveyance, along its four sides, were oblong bars of iron, and in the center was a warm fur rug. One side only of the carriage opened. On the side opposite the door was a rack reaching from the window to the floor, in which stood six or eight light but

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strongly made frames, over which was stretched the thinnest parchment-like paper. The top of the vehicle was tufted and padded. The prevailing color was dark green. In shape it was somewhat longer and broader than the usual carriage. There was a small revolving circular ventilator in front, over the mirror, which could be opened or closed at will, and which could also be used by the occupant for conversing with the driver.

The man arose, and, opening the ventilator, told the coachman to drive on. Meanwhile I enjoyed the wonderful effect of the little interior—its rich gloom, the strong light from the shaded lamp which was thrown over the floor, the bright electric light gleaming through the falling snow into the window on my left.

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The night, being so disagreeable, made the interior seem very bright and comfortable by contrast, as the man closed the sliding wooden shutters, separating us entirely from the snow-storm without. There was an artificial warmth which I could not understand, and with it all a sense of security and coziness. The stranger's manner was both gentle and reassuring. We rode in silence over the rough pavement until we reached the smooth asphalt. Then he began:

“I do not consider myself superstitious, but somehow I don't like it—that little bird hovering in front of my window. It seems like a bad omen, and it was a shadow which startled me. My life seems haunted with shadows, and they always bring misfortune to me.”

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We were both silent for a time, when he went on:

“How curious life is! Here am I riding with you, a total stranger, long past midnight. You are the first I have ever admitted into this wagon, with the exception of my faithful Cato, who is driving. If one could only see from the beginning how strangely one’s life is to be ordered.”

The stranger’s voice was rich and deep. I hoped he would continue so that I might get some idea of him and his peculiar mode of life, and what was going on night after night in this interior. I waited for him to proceed.

“Have you known any trouble or sorrow in your life?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied; “I have lost nearly all who were dear to me in this round world.”

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“Then,” said he, “I will tell you my story with the hope that it will be both understood and appreciated. I loved from childhood a charming girl, sweet and pure. I need not go into the detail of all that boyish love, but in my early manhood and her early womanhood we were married—and what a sweet bride she was!

“We lived in an old white farmhouse in a village near the great city—a beautiful place, a long, low, two-story-and-attic farmhouse, probably fifty or sixty years old. How well I can see it—its sloping roof, the extension, the quaint doorway with side-lights and with a window over the top, the front porch with gracefully shaped newels, the long piazza running the entire length of the extension, great chimneys at each end, and enormous pine-trees in front of the

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house! The house stood on a little elevation, with terraced bank, and with a pretty fence inclosing it. Beyond was an old well with lattice-work sides and door, and a pathway trodden by the feet of former occupants, long since dead. In front of the house were circular beds of old-time flowers—sweet-williams, lady's-slippers, larkspur, and foxglove. At the rear, great banks of tiger-lilies threw their delicate blue shadows against the white surface of our little home. In one corner of our garden we had left the weeds to grow luxuriantly, like miniature forest trees, and found much pleasure in studying their beautiful forms. How fine they looked in silhouette against the sunset sky! On one side of the old-fashioned doorway were shrubs and a rose-of-Sharon tree,

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and on the other, honeysuckle and syringa-bushes. There were also many kinds of fruit—and shade-trees.

“How happily we walked up and down the shady lanes of that little village! For us the birds sang sweetly. We took delight in our flowers, and everything about us. In the evening we would enjoy the sunsets, returning home arm in arm in the afterglow, to sit in the cool of the evening on the piazza and to listen to the wind as it sighed through the pines. What music they made for us! We compared it with what poets of all ages had sung of them, and went to sleep, lulled to rest by the wind through their soft boughs.”

He paused again, evidently thinking of the happy time.

“How can I tell you,” he resumed,

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“of the life that went on in that simple old farmhouse? Our pleasant woodfire on the hearth; a few photographs from the old masters on the walls; our favorite books of poetry and fiction, which we read together during the long winter evenings, while the pine-trees sighed outside, and all was so comfortable and cozy within; or the lovely walks in spring and summer, through the by-ways of the pretty little village, with its hedgerows, blackberries, and wild flowers. How we watched for the first violets, and what joy the early blossoms gave us! What pleasure we took in those delightful years, and how smoothly our lives ran on! Each day I went to the city, and was always cheered by the thought that my sweet wife would be at the station to meet me. How pure she looked in the summer

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evenings, clad in her thin white dresses, with a silver fan and brooch, her dark hair and eyes like those of a startled fawn!

“Well, I need not dwell longer on all this. It was only for a few short years, when one cruel cold day about the happy Christmas-time she was taken ill, and grew steadily worse, and all that could be done for her would not save her. She died. I can see her now—her dark hair laid back on the pillow, and the peaceful, happy smile on her face. We buried her beneath the snow, in the old graveyard overlooking the river, and I went home broken-hearted.”

I heard the poor fellow sigh, and for a time he was silent as the carriage went on through the snow. “What can be the connection of this queer craft with

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what he is telling me?" I thought. When he resumed, he said:

"For months I tried to live on in the little house, but life became terrible. In the evenings, as I sat by the pleasant log-fire, I would imagine I heard her footsteps on the stairs, and her voice calling me. I did my best to conquer my grief, but it was of no use. The light seemed gone out of my life. At last I could stand it no longer, and I moved all my worldly possessions to another house in the same village. I could not bear to think of going away from the place entirely.

"When the springtime came again, and the lovely flowers were in bloom, and the birds were singing their sweet songs; when the wind breathed softly through the pine-trees, and she was gone, the sunsets were in vain, and all

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nature seemed mourning. After this I busied myself with all kinds of occupation, but without success. Life became sadder and sadder, until finally in despair I took a foreign trip. I traveled far and wide, but always with the same weary despondency and gloom. The image of my loved one was always with me. Nothing in life satisfied me. I wandered through country after country, looking at old masters, grand churches, listening to cathedral music, but always before me was the same picture—the old white farmhouse, the great mournful pines, and with it all the memory of the sweet life now departed, for which nothing could make amends.”

Then he was silent, and as we drove over the soft, snow-covered asphalt, he became absorbed in thought.

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“After a year or so of restless foreign travel I drifted back to my own country and to the little village. Night after night I wandered around the empty house where we had lived, and through the little garden, and would stand at midnight listening to the sad sighing of the wind through the pine-trees, which to me sounded like a requiem for the dead. Many a moonlight night have I stood gazing into the windows, and imagine her looking out at me as in the happy days of old, and I would walk up and down the path thinking, oh, how sadly! of the times we used to return by it from our evening walks.

“Finally the little village became hateful to me. I could endure it no longer, and I shook its dust from my feet. With reluctance I moved away into the heart of the great city, but with

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the same longing in my heart—the same despair. I hunted up my two faithful black servants who had lived with us for several years. I bought a house in the old part of the city, and there we now live, and I am well cared for by them. Let me read you portions of a letter from her—one of the last she wrote,” and he took from his pocket a little morocco book with monogram in silver script letters. He rose and asked the driver to stop, and turning the light up, said: “This will give you some idea of the sweet life, with its love of nature, that went on in and about that little cottage. The letter was written to me when I was in another city.” He read as follows:

“My dear, I can hardly tell you how lovely the shadows looked as I strolled around our little house this evening, and

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was filled with delight by their beautiful but evasive forms. To begin with, you remember the exquisite, almost silhouette, shadow of the rose-of-Sharon bush by the front door. I gave it a long study to-night. Its fine, decorative character reminded me of a Japanese drawing, only it is far more delicate and subtle. If this could be painted in soft gray on the door-posts and around the little side windows, how it would beautify our plain dwelling, and what a permanent reminder it would be of our delightful summer days!

“But if I spend too much time on a single shadow, I shall have no room left to tell you of the greater ones we have enjoyed together . . . From the path near the gate, and looking toward the house, I saw to-night, and seemed to feel for the first time, the wonderful

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tenderness of the great shadow which nearly covers the end and side of our house. How mysterious our kitchen became, with its shed completely inclosed in velvety gloom suggesting both sorrow and tragedy; while the other end of the house was covered with fantastic forms, soft and ethereal, and with a delicacy indescribable . . . But when the moon came up, and the soft shadows of the pines were cast on the pure white weather-boards of our little home,—the shadows of our own pines, the pines we love so well, and through whose branches we have heard music sweet and low, soft and sad,—then I thought of you as I studied their masses tossing so gently, their movement almost imperceptible, and I longed for you as I studied their moving forms, their richness, variety, and texture—for you to

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tell me of their artistic beauty—your delicate, poetic appreciation of their loveliness. . . . And at last, may the sun and moon shine brightly and cast beautiful shadows among and over the tombstones for you and for me, my dear, and may a blessed hope make the sunset of life glorious for us both.”

When he had finished reading, and had asked the driver to drive on, he became absorbed and silent, and I thought, “How strange to be riding through the streets of the city after midnight in a whirling snowstorm with a stranger, in a vehicle so remarkable, listening to such a pathetic love-story, such a beautiful description of quiet domestic life.” It was a charming idyl.

“You can get an idea from this,” he said, “of the delightful, contented life which went on in the little cottage,”

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and he sat holding the book in his hands as though he were living it all over again, while the bright silver script monogram gleamed and glistened on the cover until he turned down the light, and for a time we drove over the smooth asphalt in utter silence.

“Do you wonder,” he suddenly asked, “that the shadow of that little bird has caused me uneasiness, and yet do you not see that almost the last letter she wrote me was filled with omens, shadows? It is but natural that I should have some feeling about it—and yet, why should I care? I have only myself and my two old servants who could be affected by it, bad or good. For myself, my only desire is to live long enough to complete my work; then I am both ready and willing to go. I shall welcome death with delight.”

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I had become so absorbed in his story that I had forgotten all about my surroundings; but now as he paused I again asked myself what strange connection had this sad story, and the letter, and all that he had been telling me, with the wagon; for I was sure that in some queer way the story would help to explain it all.

“While in Europe,” he went on, “I studied the old masters a great deal, particularly the halos and nimbuses surrounding the heads of the saints. I cannot begin to tell you how interesting they became to me. I was struck with the exquisite workmanship bestowed on many of them, but fine as they were, they never came up to my idea of what a halo should be. As my loved one was so pure and gentle, I always thought of her as a saint (and indeed she is

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such), and I would become interested and imagine what kind of halo I would surround her with if I were painting her—not one of the halos of the old masters seemed fine enough or ethereal enough for her. I had always been fond of art, and had been considered a fair amateur artist. One evening after I had moved to the city, and while riding in a cab (oh, how gloomy!) on a snowy evening something like this very night, I looked through the window down at an electric light, and there I saw the loveliest halo, in miniature. Such tints! A heavenly vision! I thought of the old masters, of the beautiful Siena Madonna, and with sudden joy I thought: ‘Why should I not paint the image of her I love? Why should I not clothe her in Madonna-like robes, with a halo which could come only

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out of the nineteenth century? Why should she not have a halo far outshining and far surpassing in beauty halo ever painted by mortal man? I rode nearly the whole night through, evidently to the despair of the driver, as I repeatedly asked him to stop opposite electric lights and street-lamps.

“From that day I had a new purpose in life. I had this wagon built just as you see it. For months I thought of it. Over and over again I drew my plans before the vehicle was actually constructed. Then I began my work. Old Cato, who is driving, sits night after night, unmindful of the cold, wrapped in his great fur coat, and he waits and I work through the midnight hours to conceive and make real the new Madonna.”

What a strange, subtle connection

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the whole thing had, as he suddenly tapped on the small window and we stopped directly in front of an electric light! As he opened the sliding shutter I saw, through the frosted window and the feathery snow, such a vision of loveliness—a little halo that could scarcely be described in words. It was like a miniature circular rainbow, intensified and glorified by the glittering rays of the penetrating electric light.

“What could be more beautiful than that? Isn’t it exquisite?” he asked. “Did ever painted saint have a halo like that?”

I held my breath, for I had never seen anything so beautiful.

“I have worked at it for a long time. I have not yet accomplished it, but I hope to. I am coming nearer to it every night in which I can work.

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There are not many during the winter; the conditions of atmosphere and temperature must be just right. On foggy nights, or when the air is filled with light, flying snow—these are the nights in which the little halos glow around the electric lights, street-lamps, and lights in show-windows. Oh,” he said, “they fill me with a happiness and delight I cannot describe, as I try all kinds of experiments to transfix the beautiful colors of their delicate rays!

“Let me show you,” he went on, and he lifted one of the frames which I have already described, covered with a thin parchment-like paper. This he carefully buttoned to a groove in the window. On the surface of the stretched parchment the little halo glowed with its prismatic tints, and again I held my breath at the beauty of it. I too was

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becoming a halo-worshiper. Then he lifted from the rack on the side, and held up to the light, first one and then another of the frames on the parchment surface of which he had actually traced with lines of color, against the gloom beyond, radiating lines crossing and re-crossing, glowing with rainbow tints seen through and against the window.

“Do you know anything of Frankenstein’s wonderful Magic Reciprocals, sometimes called Harmonic Responses?”¹ he asked. “How I longed

¹ The Magic Reciprocals or Harmonic Responses, were discovered by Gustavus Frankenstein, and are properly drawn in color. The following are extracts from letters received from Mr. Frankenstein, to whom the author is indebted for the drawings at the beginning and end of this story: “To-morrow morning I shall send them. They are transcendently lovely. They are halos, if ever there was a halo. So wonderfully magical are they that I think thou wilt modify thy language, and perhaps say that Frankenstein produces halos almost, if not quite, to the very perfection. Why, they seem to dazzle and bewilder like the very sun itself. They do not actually emit light, but they

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for his marvelous power, so that I might experiment with them. But they were far beyond my skill, and also, perhaps, too scientific and geometrical for my purpose; and so I was forced to discard them and begin afresh in my own way. I have had reasonable success, although I have not yet reached the purity of color nor the brilliancy that I wish. I

look like the *soul* of light. More like beautiful thoughts are they, spirits of loveliness, than like anything tangible." . . . "I was a long time working out the mathematical problem of the perfectly balanced and completely symmetrical circular harmonic responses; and then the drawings were executed with the greatest care as to perfect precision and accuracy." . . . "The little round white spot in the center imparts an animating expression to the whole Response; and now, as I write, it occurs to me very forcibly that the whole Response looks something like—and very much like—the iris of the eye, and the little round spot in the center is the pupil. If the iris were all iris, having no pupil in the center, it would appear expressionless and not vividly suggestive of the soul of life. The spot in the center may be looked upon as the tangible existence or thing which is the source of the surrounding halo." Again: "The true and complete Response—the mathematical assertion—has the animating spot in the center."

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do not know that mortal man ever can. I have tried all sorts of experiments—lines of silver crossed with lines of gold; prismatic threads of silk; and now I have abandoned them all, and beginning again, perhaps for the fortieth time. But if I am only able to do it, nothing can give me greater happiness. I can close my eyes in peace at last.” After he had shown me his experiments, he removed the little frame from the window, closed the sliding shutter on the side, and, turning the circular ventilator, asked the driver to drive on.

“Now for an extended view,” he said, and he opened the shutter of one of the front windows, and then of the other on each side of the mirror. What a vista of loveliness! A long perspective of glowing halos, vanishing down the street through the flying snow, until

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they were mere specks of light in the distance. The whole atmosphere was filled with circular rainbows, and again he dwelt on their beauty. They glowed with ultramarine, with delicate green, with gold and silver, and like light from burnished copper, and our little vehicle seemed a moving palace of delight, as we drove on through the blinding storm. Turning into one of the narrower streets, away from the electric lights, we saw the long line of receding gas-lamps, each with its softly subdued nimbus, and he said in a low and gentle voice, almost a whisper, "The street of halos."

When he had closed the shutters again he said, "Let me show you my cabinet of colors and working tools." He pulled out a shallow drawer, and there on small porcelain plaques (the kind

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used by water-color painters) side by side, in regular order, was every shade of red, from the faintest pink to the deepest crimson. He opened the next drawer, and instead of the red was an arrangement of blues, from delicate turquoise to deepest ultramarine. In the third drawer was an arrangement of yellows, running from Naples to deepest cadmium.

“I deal in primary colors,” he said, “for what would you paint rainbows in but red, blue, and yellow?”

Then he opened the fourth drawer, and there, laid with precision, were long-handled brushes from the finest sable (mere pin points) up to thick ones as large as one's finger. There were flat ones and round ones, short ones and long ones. As he opened the fifth drawer, “For odds and ends,” he said.

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This was a little deeper than the others, and in it were sponges fine and coarse, erasers, scrapers, and boxes of drawing-tacks of various sizes. In the last drawer were soft white rags and sheets of blotting-paper of assorted sizes.

After he had shown me the contents of the cabinet, he said, "I have been quite disturbed by the shadow of that little bird. Will you join me in a glass of old sherry?" He opened the locker underneath the seat, and brought out an odd-shaped bottle, which he unscrewed, handing me a small, thistle-shaped glass and a tin box containing crackers.

"It is a bad night," he said; "a very bad night. I feel it, even, with the warmth of this interior. Those long bars of iron are filled with hot water, which usually keeps me very warm."

Then he passed through the ventila-

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tor, to the driver, some crackers and sherry. . After he had closed it, and put away the bottle, box, and glasses, we both mused a long time, the halo-painter completely lost in reverie, and I thinking of the undying love of such a man—a man who could love but one and for whom no other eyes or voice could ever mean so much. With him love was an all-absorbing passion. He had given his heart without reserve, and for him no other love could ever bloom again. I thought of him sitting, night after night, in his solitary vehicle working at the halo—the new halo which should surround the head of her he loved. I thought of him in the lonely early morning hours, working at a nimbus which was far to outshine in beauty and delicacy any painted or dreamed of by God-fearing saint-painters of old.

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He opened the shutters, and the light from the lamp began to grow dimmer as the early morning light shone faintly through the windows. I noticed the deep furrows of care and sorrow which marked his strong, pathetic face, purified by suffering and lighted by divine hope—the face of one who lived in another world, and for whom all of life was centered in his ideal—one who was in the world, but not of it.

As he bade me good-by, his face beamed in the early Christmas morning light with indescribable tenderness; and as the little wagon with its faithful old black driver disappeared through the snow, I thought again and again of the beautiful, touching love of the man who would sit night after night trying to realize his dream of beauty, to clothe in the garb of a saint the form of her he loved.



INTERLUDE
A Doorway Bottle-Cabinet



A Doorway Bottle

INTERLUDE

PADEREWSKI

(December 27, 1891)

First it was the hum of bees,
Then the wind through forest trees,
Note of bird, and waters flowing,
Lovely fragrance, sweet things grow-
ing,

When Paderewski played.

Sorrow fled, and Hope returned,
Ambition on the altar burned,
It was not day, it was not night,
But the world was filled with golden
light

When Paderewski played.

A. W. DRAKE.

THE LOOSENED CORD



THE LOOSENED CORD

THE host was noted for his charming dinners. He had never been known to give them twice alike, and whoever was fortunate enough to be invited to one of his entertainments always had a delightful memory of it—something unusual, some wonder of the table, some setting original and peculiar. His combinations were carefully considered, and many were the stories told of them.

Once it was a delightful dinner in midsummer, where small vessels floated

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about among miniature icebergs over a sea of cobalt blue, a cool, refreshing, and unique centerpiece.

At another time the centerpiece was a large, circular, shallow vessel of brightly burnished copper, filled with water, and surrounded with small pots of growing verbenas—pink, crimson, purple, white, and variegated, fringing the miniature lake like a beautiful meadow of flowers. On the surface of the water floated delicate blown-glass balls of various sizes, like bubbles, kept in motion by gold and silver fish swimming about among them; they caught reflections of color from the flowers, and high lights gleamed here and there, thrown from the softly glowing candles above. Now and then a gold or a silver fish would be magnified through a glass ball until it became a golden or sil-

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ver bubble drifting slowly over the water. Old Russian hammered copper receptacles at the four corners of the table held towering rose-bushes in full bloom, so that the lovely guest of the evening sat in a bower of green and roses.

I

To-night every one was wondering what new device, what new treatment of the table, the host had evolved. The dinner was held in a lofty studio at the top of the house, in early spring. Rare low-toned tapestries adorned the side walls. Here and there gleamed brass and copper plaques of the fifteenth century. Venetian glass glittered in antique carved cabinets. There were old musical instruments, crucifixes, paintings, arms, and bric-à-brac from

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every quarter of the globe. The night being warm, the great skylight had been thrown open, and above the beautiful studio there could be seen a velvety patch of sky, through which the stars twinkled softly, making a marked contrast to the rich surroundings of the interior.

The host had provided a table marked by the simplicity of its decoration—a few flowers here and there, bits of old repoussé silver of the times of the Georges, dainty glass and china, and that was all. When the company entered the room there was an exclamation, and all eyes were turned toward the chair assigned to the honored guest, for, attached to it by a most delicate silken cord, floated a miniature balloon, swayed by every current of air which passed through the great studio. It

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was a balloon perfect in all its details, a complete miniature of a real and possible one, not the red ball of the toy-shops. All its ropes and stays were of threads of silk, golden and delicate apple-green, crossing and recrossing one another. Beneath it, instead of the usual car or basket, hung a circular cage of gossamer-like workmanship. In it was a swinging perch on which sat a little bird that sang with the greatest delight as the balloon rocked to and fro, held in place by its single cord of silk.

It was a charming company. There was a wit, a naval officer, a contralto singer, a story-teller—but why enumerate all of that delightful group? The studio and table looked lovely in the soft glow of candle-light, for neither gas nor electric light had any part in

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the host's entertainment. Later on, when the merriment was at its height, the voices were almost drowned by the notes of the little songster in his gilded cage. Just as the contralto had arisen to sing, the silken cord which held the balloon became loosened in some accidental manner. Hands were eagerly but vainly extended to catch it, and all eyes were turned upward as the balloon rose rapidly higher and higher out of reach. The joyous notes of the bird grew fainter and fainter until balloon and songster disappeared through the open skylight, into the patch of velvety sky studded with stars. The merriment was hushed, and it was minutes before any one spoke, and then the bronzed naval officer suggested that they should go to the roof and see which way the wind was blowing. They as-

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cended the winding stairs, and the officer held up his handkerchief to catch the breeze.

“The wind is due north,” he said, “and by morning the little bird will be well on its way toward the Gulf.”

They returned to the studio, but do what they would, the conversation flagged, and it was impossible to revive the merriment. Even the contralto's beautiful song failed to interest them, and nothing seemed to restore the spirits of the guests. Each one was thinking of the little bird; each one seemed to hear its ecstatic notes as it sailed away out of sight under the stars, and a feeling of sympathy and pity for the little prisoner came over them all.

Coffee and cigars were brought, and the ladies disappeared. The party broke up at midnight. Carriages were

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called and the host bade his guests good night. He whose dinners had always been a success was forced to acknowledge that to-night's was a dismal failure, and he sat gloomy and silent, thinking of the little balloon sailing away through the blackness of the night, carrying the imprisoned songster he knew not whither.

II

The sun is just setting behind a beautiful old French town on the west bank of the southern Mississippi. The streets are filled—flooded with sunlight. The gardens are blooming with oleander-trees. There is the humming of bees, singing of birds, and a fragrance indescribable. The Mississippi stretches away like a great sil-

THE LOOSENED CORD

ver serpent between golden meadows and headlands on either side, until it becomes a mere glint of light in the distance. Children are playing in the streets, and dark-eyed French girls in their pure white dresses are sitting in the balconies among the flowers. Many of the villagers are wending their way to the post-office for the evening mail, and here and there in a doorway is a gossiping group. Suddenly there is an exclamation. The children stop their play, and point to the sky. At the extreme end of the village street is a mere speck floating and swaying in the air as it comes nearer and nearer. Heads are peering out of windows. The villagers have forgotten their mail and their gossip. All is hushed. There in the yellow light something floats in the sky, coming steadily nearer. Music

THE LOOSENED CORD

is heard—bird-music. Among those watching are a few brothers of the church, who cross themselves and look wonderingly at the rapidly growing speck. On it comes, larger and larger it grows, and now a miniature balloon is seen sailing slowly, swaying gracefully to and fro, but keeping almost a steady course down the quiet street. The villagers are filled with awe, as floating overhead almost within reach the little balloon passes on and on in the golden light of the dying day, with its feathered passenger sending forth its liquid, almost heavenly song.

At the other end of the village street is a group of people standing about a noble-looking house with a double piazza where flowers are blooming—cactus, crimson roses, and yellow jasmine. The group includes old and young, men,

THE LOOSENED CORD

women, and little children, a cripple on crutches, and colored servants; for they are standing about the house of Rose Danian—she who has done sweet deeds of charity throughout the short life which is now slowly ebbing away. All wait in reverent mood; even the children forget their play: for all love her, and remember some kindness,—some unexpected, generous deed,—and the whole town is in mourning. In the room above, which is flooded with soft warm sunlight, stand parents and friends, and the village priest administering the last sacrament to the dying girl. Her luxuriant auburn hair surrounds her head like the aureole of a saint. Her eyes gaze into the distance with a look of rapture.

And now down the village street, through a cloud of golden dust raised

THE LOOSENED CORD

by a passing vehicle, there floats gently, gently, before the house of Rose Danian, the little balloon with its half-famished singing prisoner that has made so long and perilous a journey. Caught by a sudden current of air, it drifts lower and lower until it pauses underneath the upper balcony, trembling with a slight quivering motion before the open window, in the tender, soft light of departing day. The last look of the dying girl rests on the little songster as it pours forth again and again its ecstatic song with delight indescribable, then drops from its perch. What curious coincidence causes the balloon suddenly to collapse, and to sink slowly and softly until it lies on the balcony among the flowers, it, too, like the little bird, with life extinct?

The priest crosses himself. The

THE LOOSENED CORD

weeping friends drop on their knees as the last ray of sunlight disappears gilding here and there a roof, here and there a bit of projecting ornament. The golden light changes to a delicate apple-green; the great river gleams and glows, assuming prismatic hues reflected from the sky above. All is hushed and solemn in the twilight, as the priest says reverently, "A miracle, my children! a miracle!"

In the chapel of the church of Saint Mary, just in front of the altar, to the left of the picture of Mary and the Child, hangs suspended from a curiously wrought brass scroll, or arm, the little balloon. It was the clock-maker of the village, who, with loving care, arranged the ribs of wire which hold it out until it assumes its natural, inflated form.

THE LOOSENED CORD

Underneath is the delicate cage, and, done with the tenderest love of the village taxidermist, there sits the little feathered songster on its swinging perch, its head turned upward, its throat expanded, its mouth open, apparently singing its last rapturous song. It is placed there as a token of love to mark the miracle of the dying day of sweet Rose Danian.

Children peer between the wrought-iron bars of the great gates, with their noble family escutcheon, which protect the chapel. Mothers pause, looking lovingly at the balloon with its lifeless songster. The cripple, leaning on his crutch, gazes long and wonderingly, with almost superstitious awe, at this singular token of loving remembrance. Many are the stories told of beautiful Rose Danian on this, the anniversary

THE LOOSENED CORD

day of the miracle, and in the church mass has been celebrated for the repose of her soul. But now vespers are being held; great shafts of colored light are thrown through the stained-glass windows, penetrating the gloom of the darkest recesses, flooding the picture of Mary and the Child, lighting and gilding the little balloon until it looks like a floating glory, or halo. There is an odor of burning incense, the grand chant of the brothers, and the solemn swell of the organ.

Penitents young and old are kneeling in the church, but who, think you, is standing before the altar in the chapel, examining with intense interest the little balloon, while the distant voices of the brothers and the last strains from the organ die away? On whom, think you, does the sweet, pensive smile of Mary

THE LOOSENED CORD

rest, and to whom does the Infant Saviour hold out his little hands?

It is the host, whose imagination has been kindled, whose heart has been touched, by the curious story of the miracle which he has heard to-day for the first time. He has found his long-lost device.

As he passes out of the church and down the village street, again the great river gleams and glows, the sunset sky flames and burns with crimson light. And as he leaves the little town behind him, now almost lost in the purple mist of twilight, he murmurs to himself, "How strange a transformation—a thought of beauty has become a miracle of God!"

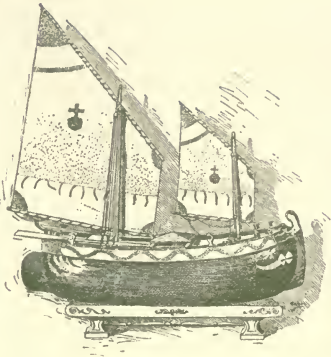


ALEXANDER W. GRAVES

The Portrait



ALEXANDER W. DRAKE
THE MAN



I

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

OF Alexander Wilson Drake it might well be said that the enjoyment of natural and spiritual beauty was the controlling purpose of his life. To art as a career his first thoughts had therefore naturally turned. To acquire the necessary facility in drawing he studied with August Will, and also attended the night classes at the Cooper Union. With improvement he became a student at the National Academy of Design. In both schools he had for a colleague Augustus Saint-Gaudens, then an apprentice (to a cameo-cutter), and seemingly unaware of being indentured to Fame.

A craving for excellence was instinctive with Mr. Drake, and after he had established a successful wood-engraving business of his own the willingness to take vast trouble for the slightest gain in quality was cultivated to

a habit. It was natural, therefore, that when in midyear, 1870, the first issue of "Scribner's Monthly" (now "The Century" Magazine) was prepared, his coöperation was sought by Richard Watson Gilder, who was responsible for the art policy and make-up of the magazine. A finer alliance of editorial leadership and expert direction than was obtained in these two men could not be imagined. For forty years they worked in perfect unison and, with the steadfast aid and counsel of Mr. Theodore L. DeVinne, brought about a revolution in the art of illustration.

Mr. Drake supplied the taste and steady pressure that forced the advance in printing. His leadership had a threefold quality: to encourage the artist to find in himself unthought-of resources of truth and beauty, to stimulate the engraver to preserve the tone and feeling of the artist as well as his graphic qualities, and to hold the printer to an adequate conveyance to paper of all that had been gained for art by tireless love and liberal expense.

Year after year Mr. Drake began his working day by a visit to the printers, where

the runs of the previous day were inspected. His criticisms were supplications rather than fault-findings, and were warmed with his never-failing humor. Emulation was a part of the atmosphere of the place; still, it could happen that a press crew would fall below concert-pitch or encounter a difficulty that to them seemed trivial. Such a case merely inspired him to increase his attention, and as it was impossible to evade him, a degree of uneasiness would persist until the refractory form was run off.

A great leap forward was made when it was found possible to transfer a drawing or painting to the wood-block by means of the camera. Thus a mechanical process enlarged the scope of the artist in illustration, and in a sense forced the engraver to paint with the burin; for Mr. Drake now demanded of him not only that he should reproduce the body of a picture, but also the feeling and spirit which might be called its soul. Thereupon the life of the engraver grew more and more complex and artistic, with the result that several of the craft gained high distinction. Yet the aspiring engravers were not

allowed to hold the ground they had gained by skill and patience; the half-tone and other processes of transferring a picture to a metal plate put them out of business. While Mr. Drake eased the decline of many of them by employing them to trim and perfect the new-fangled metal plates and also those used in color printing, his fastidious care involved an expense which few publishers were willing to assume. So the wood-engravers as a large and important class went the way of the world, save three or four of exceptional talent, including Timothy Cole, who was then producing his remarkable series of wood-engravings of the old masters and was enabled to continue his work with the result that his incomparable blocks, engraved only for "The Century," number about two hundred and thirty.

After the daily visit to the printers, Mr. Drake's duties brought him in touch with the procession of artists, engravers, and platemakers that moved on in quiet deliberation from one year's end to another. He was wont to convey his pictorial idea by a few strokes of a pencil, and cautious artists would

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submit rough sketches before buckling down to the final task. Often the consultation over the completed picture called for equal tact from editor and artist. It was at such times that Mr. Drake's "manifest kindness and unvarying gentleness," as one of the most individual artists defined the manner, enabled him to win coöperation for revision which a more aggressive criticism would have lost. The engraved blocks, and later the plates, were subjected to a more minute scrutiny than the drawings, until the engravers grew so used to calls for an improving touch here and there to brighten the effect or more closely favor the original that a failure to ask for betterment would have seemed out of routine. While tenacious to the point of obstinacy of his views and opinions, he was studiously gentle in stating them, and was loath to urge them unless his sense of duty was involved.

In 1880, Mr. Drake had his first look at the art treasures of England, France, and Italy. The trip was arranged as much for the benefit of the magazine, an expectation which was richly justified, as for the rest and pleasure of a hard-worked enthusiast. He

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made the acquaintance of William Morris, Rossetti, and other noted English artists of that day, and in Italy he, with Robert Blum, was greeted and guided by Elihu Vedder and Charles Caryl Coleman; he also met Whistler in Venice.

In 1890, Mr. Drake made his second visit to Europe, which began auspiciously with a tour in Algiers, Morocco, and the enchanting cities of Spain. His companion was his only son, a boy in his teens, who was being initiated into the mysteries of art. Alas! they also came in Spain to an outpost of the great mystery, for here the boy showed signs of fever, and was rushed with every possible precaution to a London hospital. After days of tender watching the youth was laid to rest in an English cemetery, and a little later the father found solace for his sorrow in the pathetic expression of his first poem, "Kensal Green."

Out of that period of introspection came a short season of literary creation which was as delicate, significant, and individual as the art side of his career. Three short stories were published. He planned other plots to

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express the thoughts of his teeming, sensitive nature, but the demands of his vocation forbade. However, the three stories may be taken as a complete unfolding of a rare mind, with an outlook and a feeling all its own. They could not have been written by any one who had not his thirst for the beautiful and his insight into the hidden springs of art.

To a public that knew little of his charming personality and influential labors in the interest of art Mr. Drake was known chiefly as a collector. In that field he was distinctly a creator, for he awakened the perception that objects of common use often enshrine the basic lineaments of beauty. If those who, hearing that he was making new collections, sometimes scoffed, in the end they were forced to admire after beholding the revelation of human ingenuity and love of grace that was emphasized by the bringing together of selected specimens of any craft or art. Even the simple pictures on the wall-paper used to decorate the handboxes of a century ago acquired esthetic value after Mr. Drake had had the perception, not to mention courage, to frame some of his duplicates.

ALEXANDER W. DRAKE

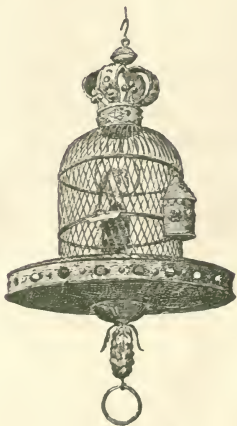
Two of his collections have been kept together: the forty little ships and boats appropriately enliven India House in the old shipping district, and the hundred bird-cages now ornament the kindly halls of Cooper Union, where the man who had brought them together was first initiated into the mysteries of drawing.

In 1913 ill health led Mr. Drake to retire from the position he had filled with historic success for forty-three years. How much that meant to hundreds of artists and writers was shown by two dinners given in his honor. More than two hundred illustrators and writers joined in a memorable gathering. Shortly afterward, on February 25, 1913, four hundred members of his art and professional clubs joined in a famous "Dinner of Alexander Wilson Drake and His Friends, at the Aldine Club." He who had often embellished feasts to others with amusing menus was celebrated in a souvenir of fifty pages, most of them being humorous sketches by prominent artists, making good-natured sport of the salient traits of the editor and collector.

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Most men die poor, and only a few die rich; but fewer still leave behind them so much of the remembrance that wealth cannot create as does Alexander Wilson Drake.

CLARENCE CLOUGH BUEL
in the "Century Magazine."









II

AN APPRECIATION

WITH the death of Alexander W. Drake there passes from our sight a figure so benignant and beloved that more than one friend must feel irresistibly impelled to supplement with a word of warm personal tribute the epitome of his many printed *East Side of Dining Room* achievements of his important useful life, often his noblest cherished work in magazines and newspapers, have there been recalled to remembrance. The great debt which the country owed to his leadership in perfecting the allied arts of wood-engraving and printing has received fresh recognition and will claim renewed acknowledgment in the history of American art.

But his own himself was much greater than his struggles, varied and lasting as they were. "None elsewhere," said George W. Cable, "have I seen so good modesty and devotion of character so unflinchingly combined



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WITH the death of Alexander W. Drake there passes from our sight a figure so benignant and beloved that more than one friend must feel irresistibly impelled to supplement with a word of earnest personal tribute the epitome of his career printed in the daily press. The main achievements of his singularly useful life, often heretofore chronicled both in magazines and newspapers, have there been recalled to remembrance. The great debt which the country owed to his leadership in perfecting the allied arts of wood-engraving and printing has received fresh recognition and will claim renewed acknowledgment in the history of American art.

But the man himself was much greater than his triumphs, varied and lasting as they were. "Never elsewhere," said George W. Cable, "have I seen so great modesty and devotion of character so unfailingly combined

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with such masterful gifts and achievements as in Mr. Drake in the third of a century that I have known him." And with the rare combination of qualities here set forth there seemed no room among them for anything even resembling egotism; there was no word or thought of self. He was content to say, "My work is my biography," and he often quoted that noble aphorism, "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." Yet even casual acquaintances perceived or felt in him natural powers surpassing all that he accomplished and exceptional traits of character as yet unregistered in words.

For seldom if ever have such positive qualities as a manly strength of purpose, untiring zeal, and unflinching loyalty been cloaked in such a gentleness of nature as in his unique and many-sided personality. The truth is that, deeper than all these endowments, he had an ingrained *love of beauty* that was to him the very breath of life. This was the foundation of his character and the cornerstone of his career. All his activities, indeed, were tinged with the latent force and inspiration of this enchantment of his soul.

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It was the hidden dynamic power that speedily made him a connoisseur in his own special field and eventually one of the most remarkable collectors of modern times. Throughout his many years as the honored art director of "The Century" and "St. Nicholas" magazines this love of beauty was the incentive to a tireless patience in striving to attain at any cost the utmost possible result or the long-coveted perfection. To see him with an engraver's proof in his hand or bending over a first sheet from the press was to behold an artist at work upon a task he loved; he never spared himself in the effort to insure a flawless rendering of a fellow-artist's creation. Even in drawings submitted to him by young illustrators he sought and never failed to note and encourage that "touch of real art," as he phrased it, that he dearly prized, and his trained discrimination gave added strength and comradeship to his relations with painters and members of the larger world of art. They felt that Mr. Drake's taste and knowledge were well-nigh infallible, and their trust in him was deepened because they knew the absolute integrity of his judgment. With

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all his gentleness, there was never the least taint of capitulation in any verdict that he rendered. Here no compromise was possible, and his loyalty to his ideals was as sacred as his conscience.

Of course the graphic arts alone could not satisfy him; they were but the vestibule to the temple of color, form, and music. All beauty was his heritage, and to him collecting was not, as to many, a fad: it was a quiet, perpetual, glorified enthusiasm that enriched immeasurably his own life and thousands of other lives by its sure instinct for the genuine in art. It would take a volume to do justice to any of his collections, but the range, variety, and extent of the rich spoil he gathered are well known to the art world and the public.

Again, no visitor needs to be reminded of the charm and distinction of his home, wherein was gathered so much fascinating and endlessly interesting treasure-trove,—“where color glowed unglittering, and the soul of visible things showed silent happiness.” Each individual object was, in truth, a part of his life. He loved it. It was, in its de-

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gree, a symbol of all that beauty meant to him; and in the mass the whole rich array was softened into a single, mellow harmony that thrilled the beholder with the sense of beauty in sumptuous repose.

His gentleness was not that of manner only, but was the natural expression of a deeper kindness of heart. With his associates in daily tasks there was no end to the courtesies, great or small, that he constantly rendered not only whenever opportunity presented itself, but frequently when the opportunity was of his own making. Whenever good or bad fortune befell, he was first to offer congratulations or sympathy; and by countless ingenious and original acts of kindness he lit up the routine of crowded hours, and made smiles resume their proper sovereignty on tired or troubled faces. His very presence brought with it a sense of cheerful tranquillity, for it always meant that a jest or story was imminent, or some quaint by-play of comment that left one refreshed and gladdened; and many silent benedictions followed him as he dispensed these sunny, exhilarating greetings from day to day.

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Every least gift to his friends bore the royal stamp of beauty, while in the manner of its bestowal there was always some quaint or tender touch of surprise that added charm and made it doubly precious.

As for the assistance of every sort—advice, encouragement, patient, kindly criticism, and financial aid—which he gave to artists and others in depression or necessity, no one knows, or ever will know, the full record of his benefactions. “Think of the helping hand he has held out to hundreds of struggling young beginners in art and letters!” writes a grateful member of his corps of illustrators.

He had a genius for friendship. With his intimates he fulfilled Emerson’s definition of a friend as “one with whom we can think aloud”; and as a well-known artist has declared, “To good stories or fine music he would listen till the gray hours of the morning, and, if the opportunity offered, empty his purse to help a comrade in need.” But he exercised also a strong and subtle magnetism for men of most diverse and seemingly unrelated types. They were drawn to him

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with gentle compulsion, and he had the power to make them sharers of his own joy in the things he loved. In proof of the general esteem in which he was held, it may be mentioned that, when his health began to fail and he felt compelled to resign from five clubs, he was immediately made an honorary member for life by every one of them. His joy in friends and their affectionate pride in him will endure indeed among the recollections that are linked with life's best moments.

In England he might well have been knighted in recognition of his services to the allied arts of engraving and printing, for, as Joseph Pennell says, "He has done more for the advancement of illustration than any man living." In France his collections, if kept together, would have established another goal for art lovers in many ways resembling the Musée Carnavalet. And in these war-blinded times, when the maddened lords of destruction are casting into ruin the glorious fanes and towers that have illumined many generations, his friends, and America itself, should be more than ever grateful for this ardent devotee of beauty whose soul was bent

upon the salvage from oblivion of every least relic of art.

Back of all the grace and loveliness that charmed him in material things, he saw as clearly the spiritual values they represented, the love that had gone into the making of them.

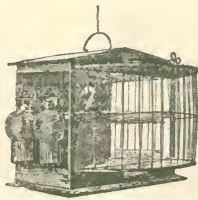
It is ideals that determine character. We are known at last by the mental pictures that we cherish. Great thoughts, noble harmonies, love of beauty, friendship—no worshiper at any of these shrines go unrewarded, and the inestimable largess they bestow brings with it always some full measure of their timelessness and spiritual power. With Mr. Drake, books and music were among the richest, most enchanting satisfactions of his leisure; but the love of beauty was a transcendent, vital force that from first to last dominated his whole being. He answered to its every call, and, like a joyous child, followed where it led. For reward, it filled his daily vision, his home, his spirit, with opalescent harmonies, and his later years with "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends." More: it made him its revealer, its interpreter, who for

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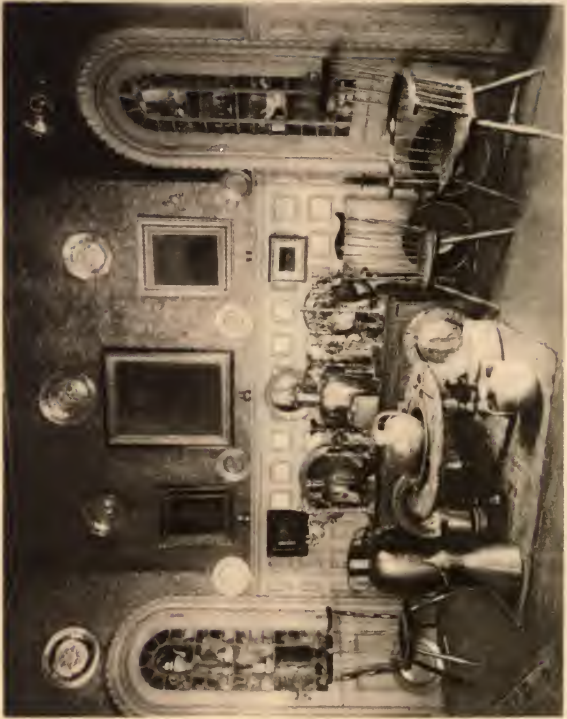
many others had opened eye and heart to the magical beauty that lies hidden all about us under the dust of common things and in the passing hour.

To those who knew him best his high idealism and transparent kindness, his personal charm and warm, indulgent comradeship, will remain in memory, as they were in reality, influences of incalculable beauty and beneficence. That he reached the allotted span of life with scarce-diminished vigor and as young at heart as ever is indeed cause for gratitude; but it is from finely sensitive natures such as his that we learn the poignant truth of Emerson's saying, "Life is not long enough for Art—not long enough for Friendship."

WILLIAM FAYAL CLARKE
in the "Century Magazine."







III

A WORD OF TRIBUTE

To the Editor of the *New York Evening Post*:

SIR: I am sure that in the throng that attended the beautiful service for Mr. Drake at the Church of the Assumption, to-day, there were many who would not be long in public acknowledgment of the qualities of mind and heart that endeared him to those—qualities which are not usual in themselves and certainly are rare in combination, and which in this instance have gone far to enrich the life of this community and of the whole country.

I shall not speak of Mr. Drake's service to the preservation of the art of wood-engraving, to which his experiments gave new vitality; and between which and extinction stands the life of our great engraver Timothy Cole and that of one or two worthy associates; or of his exploitation of painter and sculptor by



III

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SIR: I am sure that in the throng that attended the beautiful service for Mr. Drake at the Church of the Ascension to-day there were many who would like to say a public word of tribute to the qualities of mind and heart that endeared him to them—qualities which are not usual in themselves and certainly are rare in combination, and which in this instance have gone far to enrich the life of this community and of the whole country.

I shall not speak of Mr. Drake's service in the promotion of the art of wood-engraving, to which his experiments gave new vitality, and between which and extinction stands the life of our great engraver Timothy Cole and that of one or two worthy associates; or of his exploitation of painter and sculptor by

the presentation through the "Century," in conjunction with Mr. Gilder, of their finest examples. These are already matters of record, and speak for him who never spoke for himself. Enough to say that if we had had, as in France, a National Bureau of Fine Arts, Mr. Drake would have been the one man most fitted, by his ideality and his force of practical administration, to be the director of it.

I wish to speak only of two points—first, the comprehensiveness, the severity, and the loyalty of his artistic taste. Here was a man who loved beauty as a principle, seeking it out with a gentle enthusiasm, of joy, rather than stopping to rail at our abounding ugliness. He made no compromise with the integrity of his exquisite taste; no personal consideration operated to lower his standard, which ran in little things as in great. He felt that if America shall ever attain a classical sense of beauty out of which shall come an era of art of great worth, it will be by a rigid cultivation of taste in every department of life. In his more than forty years of close touch with the artists of his time,

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while his own sensibilities drew much from them, it is safe to say that he gave more than he received. His feeling for color, proportion, and form seemed faultless, and his unrecorded comments on works of art would have made one of those volumes that always seem more precious because they have never been written.

The other point, which it is wholesome to accentuate, is the constancy and abundance of his personal service. Of those who filled the church to-day I doubt if there was one who had not received from him some special, often unusual, mark of his friendliness in gift, counsel, or sympathy. To quote Shakespeare, he was

the kindest man,
The best-conditioned and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesy.

This radiance of good will is not a posthumous fancy; it was the first thought of him in the minds of those who met him and it found expression at the several memorable dinners in his honor given at the time of his retirement from his active and loyal service of the "Century." He befriended many a

struggling draughtsman and engraver, especially in the later years of his editorship when new fashions in illustration and the abandonment of engraving gave poignancy to their struggle for life. We who were associated with him knew of some of these generousities by inference, for such good actions were done by stealth only to be found out by accident. But what was as open as the day was the gentleness of his sympathy. The French say that there is no real friendship without some tenderness in it, and this moving quality he put into even casual courtesies, so that one left his presence with an access of self-respect and a kindling of brotherhood. I wish it were in my power to define more accurately this lovable quality, this charming atmosphere of the man. It is the highest tribute to him that his friends and even his acquaintances who may happen to read these lines will divine what I am so inadequately endeavoring to convey.

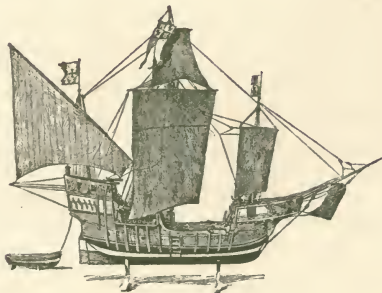
Whatever of beauty there may be in reserve after the wondrous beauty of this world few could be better qualified to enjoy and ap-

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preciate it than this sensitive spirit, who in his long life of happiness and devotion gave to a multitude the true meaning of art.

ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON.

February 7, 1916.



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